



National Council on Teacher Quality

*Testimony of Sandi Jacobs, Vice President, National Council on Teacher Quality
on Connecticut Senate Bill No. 1160
March 17, 2011*

Chairs Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Vice Chairs Senator Fonfara, Representative McCrory and Ranking Members Senator Boucher and Representative Giuliano and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony about Senate Bill 1160. I respectfully submit this testimony on behalf of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), a research and policy group dedicated to increasing the accountability and transparency of the institutions, such as states and teacher preparation programs, which have the greatest impact on teacher quality. Each year, NCTQ reviews the policies of each state that impact the teaching profession against a reform blueprint. Unfortunately, we've awarded Connecticut's policies an overall grade of D+, and that same grade to the state's policies for identifying whether teachers are effective.

Policy making around improving teacher quality to date has focused almost exclusively on qualifications – teacher credentials, majors, degrees, licensing. But increased accountability for student learning and compelling research showing that teachers are the single most important school-based drivers of student achievement¹ are moving the field towards a decidedly *performance-based* focus on teacher quality.

¹For a review of the value-added studies that examine the influence of teachers on achievement gains, see Erik Hanushek and Steven Rivkin, "Generalizations about using value-added measures of teacher quality," *American Economic Review*, 100:2 (May 2010).

This paradigm shift requires measures of performance that are able to differentiate consistently effective teachers from those whose performance is consistently ineffective. Unfortunately, the evaluation systems in use in states and districts throughout the country are not up to the task. Our current teacher evaluation systems typically find almost every single teacher to be just fine at their jobs, even though research shows a lot of variation in student performance within schools, from one classroom and teacher to the next.² As a result, we do little to recognize and cultivate excellent teachers and we do almost nothing to weed the not-at-all effective teachers out of the profession.

Spurred on in part by the recent federal Race to the Top competition, in which almost every state vied to secure some of the \$4.3 billion in federal funds, how effective teachers are at fostering growth in student achievement is increasingly a part of discussions of how teachers should be evaluated, compensated, promoted, granted tenure or dismissed. In the last year, the number of states requiring annual evaluations of all teachers increased from 15 to 21 states, and the number of states requiring that evidence of student achievement be the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations more than doubled, from 4 to 10 states. These ten states—including Louisiana, Rhode Island and Colorado—have guidelines that preclude teachers from receiving a satisfactory rating if they are found to be ineffective in the classroom.

The momentum to improve teacher evaluation has continued in 2011, without the incentive of federal dollars. New teacher evaluation bills have been introduced in legislatures across the country this term, in states such as Indiana, Illinois, New Mexico and Minnesota.

² In a recent study of teacher evaluation systems, The New Teacher Project found that among districts that use binary evaluation ratings more than 99 percent of teachers receive the satisfactory rating. Districts that use a broader range of rating options do little better; in these districts, 94 percent of teachers receive one of the top two ratings and less than 1 percent are rated unsatisfactory. See The New Teacher Project, *The Widget Effect* at <http://widgeteffect.org/>.

Connecticut commendably passed Public Act 10-111 requiring evaluations to include multiple indicators of student growth. However, this legislation stops short of what other states have done and does not ensure that evidence of student learning will be the most significant factor. To strengthen its evaluation requirements, Connecticut should consider the following recommendations for SB 1160:

➤ **Ensure that evaluations are based primarily on teachers' impact on students –**

While it is certainly appropriate to include subjective factors, such as classroom observations, evidence of student learning—including but not limited to standardized test scores—should be the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations.

➤ **Ensure that evaluations accurately differentiate among levels of teacher performance –** Evaluation instruments must utilize multiple rating categories, such as highly effective, effective, needs improvement and ineffective. A binary system that merely categorizes teachers as satisfactory or unsatisfactory is inadequate.

➤ **Require feedback and support –** Teachers should receive direct feedback about their identified strengths and weaknesses, and professional development activities should be aligned with those findings.

➤ **Identify consequences for poor performance –** Teachers who receive low ratings should be given support and the opportunity to improve. However, the timeline for improvement should be specified, as well as the consequences for failure to improve, including eligibility for dismissal. Connecticut's current law on teacher dismissal identifies "inefficiency" and "incompetence" as grounds for dismissal; however these

terms are ambiguous at best and may be interpreted as concerning dereliction of duty rather than ineffectiveness. A strong evaluation policy should provide districts with the legal basis for dismissing consistently poor performers.

- **Require evidence of teacher effectiveness to be the preponderant criterion in tenure decisions** – A robust evaluation system based on teacher effectiveness should provide the key evidence for consideration in deciding whether to grant tenure to a probationary teacher.

These recommendations are drawn from the National Council on Teacher Quality's *Blueprint for Change in Connecticut*, available at http://www.nctq.org/stpy09/updates/docs/stpy_connecticut.pdf. I have attached an excerpt from this report for your reference. We hope that you will feel free to call on the National Council on Teacher Quality as a resource as Connecticut continues to move forward. Thank you for considering this testimony.

Blueprint for Change in Connecticut

2010
State Teacher
Policy Yearbook



National Council on Teacher Quality

Blueprint for Change in Connecticut

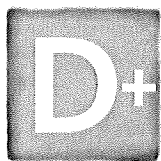
The 2009 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* provided a comprehensive review of states' policies that impact the teaching profession. As a companion to last year's comprehensive state-by-state analysis, the 2010 edition provides each state with an individualized "Blueprint for Change," building off last year's *Yearbook* goals and recommendations.

State teacher policy addresses a great many areas, including teacher preparation, certification, evaluation and compensation. With so many moving parts, it may be difficult for states to find a starting point on the road to reform. To this end, the following brief provides a state-specific roadmap, organized in three main sections.

- Section 1 identifies policy concerns that need **critical attention**, the areas of highest priority for state policymakers.
- Section 2 outlines "**low-hanging fruit**," policy changes that can be implemented in relatively short order.
- Section 3 offers a short discussion of some **longer-term systemic issues** that states need to make sure stay on the radar.

Current Status of Connecticut's Teacher Policy

In the 2009 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, Connecticut had the following grades:



Overall Grade

Area 1: <i>Delivering Well Prepared Teachers</i>	C
Area 2: <i>Expanding the Teaching Pool</i>	B-
Area 3: <i>Identifying Effective Teachers</i>	D+
Area 4: <i>Retaining Effective Teachers</i>	F
Area 5: <i>Exiting Ineffective Teachers</i>	C-

2010 Policy Update:

In the last year, many states made significant changes to their teacher policies, spurred in many cases by the Race to the Top competition. Based on a review of state legislation, rules and regulations, NCTQ has identified the following recent policy changes in Connecticut:

Teacher Evaluation:

The state's newly adopted teacher evaluation procedures call for the use of "multiple indicators" of performance, including multiple indicators of student academic growth, as well as consideration of factors such as attendance, class size and student mobility. It does not include changes in frequency or timing of evaluations.

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